



Keith Carracher, owner and president of Complete Property Maintenance is the perfect example of a company culture that encourages building from within. Whether it's passing out hats and candy on a Friday afternoon, returning the company store's profits back to employees around the holidays or promoting from inside, it's about ensuring everyone is part of the company culture. Carracher, who started as an account manager 15 years ago, became an example when he was later named general manager before being offered an ownership stake.

INSIDE INFO

Company: Complete Property Maintenance

Founded: 1977

Headquarters: Coconut Creek, FL

Employees: nearly 275 full-time, 40 part time

2009 revenue: \$14 million

LM Top 150 ranking: No. 90 (tie)

Key to being a maintenance leader: You have to pay attention to your employee retention. It's the No. 1 thing my customers want. They don't want to see a different crew; they don't want to see a different foreman. You have to respect your employees. We involve all our supervisors; we ask their advice.

TOP TRENDS

› **Contract renegotiations.** A lot of our customers have been long term. We've had to be proactive in going after them. They can't pay their bills, so we've had to come up with different programs other than what the contract states.

› **Service changes.** A lot of landscape installation companies have tried to become landscape maintenance companies. It has gotten very competitive. People are willing to do work just to pay their bills.

› **Employment shift.** It used to be employees drove our company. We control our destiny again because of the unemployment rate. We've always been able to get employees. They used to drive the wage level. Now that no one is working, they're willing to work with us more. We have gotten control back; it's a good feeling.

TOP OBSTACLES

› **Lack of loyalty.** The customer that was so faithful to us for so many years — if there was a problem they'd sit down and negotiate — now the almighty dollar has changed the whole perception. If they can save money because of the pressure they're under, they won't hesitate to terminate a contract.

› **Competition.** We have so many more people out there. There are so many illegitimate companies. Nobody governs them; nobody checks them to see — do they have insurance; do they have workers' compensation; are they paying their taxes. People will hire them if they can save money. They don't care about the legalities. It's hard to be competitive when people are willing to do work just to stay afloat — not even to make a profit.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **Full service guarantee.** When we do a landscaping installation job, that's the front door. We can also do the irrigation, landscape lighting, hardscapes; we can do everything they need done. Any landscape job I do we warranty as long as we maintain the property. I only do it if we provide the full-scale service. If I'm doing all the services, I should be accountable. We've had a lot of success on that.



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